

Dear Ian,

I am writing to you to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity I got this summer. It has been both a life-changing and eye-opening experience for me coming to the Mary Hare and experiencing what I have at Vacational Studies.

As you may understand, I was a (tad) bit sceptical coming to VacStuds for the first time, but this was only because I didn't want my expectations (that had been created by the praise and stellar reviews I've heard) to be let down. Initially, I had set my expectations somewhere in the middle in order to not be disappointed if they weren't met, but let me tell you; they were truly blown away. From the academic part of the course to the sports and social aspect of it, everything was simply perfect.

I must admit I thought four weeks seemed like an awfully long time, but it is now my perspective that it's the length of the course that makes it unique. For example, I have some friends that have gone to seemingly similar summer schools surrounding the London area, but they only stayed there for two weeks or so. Moreover, they did not experience the same attachment to their courses, nor to the friends they made as I did. It is my belief that this is due to the duration of the course. By having everyone live side by side for four weeks, you are creating a big international family that will keep in touch for a lifetime.

Furthermore, I did not expect to enjoy every single aspect of the course as much as I did! When I first did a read-through of the schedule posted on the website I was thinking to myself: "That's way too much program for anyone to handle!" But now that I've experienced it myself, I can truly say that it's just right. There's something for everyone in the program because of its variety, and it is my belief that the amount of activity we had was perfect. The friendly competitiveness and team spirit the students gain by having houses, and the diverse events that appealed to everybody are all important components of what makes VacStuds as magical as it is.

I am so extremely thankful for having this experience under my belt going into a new school year, and I think that the valuable skills I've developed during the 28 days I spent at the Mary Hare will prove most helpful in my everyday life. Socially, I am much more comfortable talking to new people with improved confidence, and I have gotten the ability to strike up a chat with anybody whom I wish to know more about. Therefore, I learnt lots of peculiar facts about different countries and cultures. Academically, I personally benefitted from the variety of classes we had and from the engagement the task-based learning program and film project created. It expanded my horizon when it comes to the different and creative ways of learning English, and I was surrounded by enthusiastic classmates the whole time who helped me adjust easily and made me feel welcome.

As you saw, my eyes were practically waterfalls and emotions were running high when the first bus containing some of my best friends left. This is the effect the course has on you. We all come from different countries and cultures, yet we are all one big family. You simply can't expect anything less when you have to leave such a wonderful course behind you for the next school year. I've already started planning and looking forward to next year's adventures, and I already know I would like to be an ambassador next year and possibly a mentor or councillor.

Finally, privilege is the word that comes to mind when thinking about the opportunity I got this summer. Thank you so much for everything you have given me!

Kindest regards,
Louise

(Louise Gogstad from Oslo, Norway wrote this letter on 19 August 2016 and it is reproduced verbatim with her permission: 'Of course you can use my letter, and it's great if this letter can be of any help or reassurance to uncertain newcomers (like I myself was).')